



18th Battalion Association

Windsor and Detroit Branch

MEMORIES

Every time we meet Harold Aikenhead, the general and competent Secretary of our London Branch, it always brings back memories of our first or second trip into the Front Line. I don't recall where it was but Harold claims it was the B & C trenches and he should know.

It was a very quiet part of the Front as the lines were far apart and the only thing you had to worry about was the occasional shelling, which didn't occur too often. About thirty yards behind the Front Line there was a reserve trench, which was narrow and not too long. Some of us were of the opinion it had been specially built for the machine guns or mortars. At the far end someone had left an obsolete bombing machine, which worked on the same principle as a large sling shot. You set the dial on the left, placed the bomb in the pocket, and pulled evenly on two handles which were attached to some heavy springs. The farther down you pulled the handles, the more distance you got on your bombs.

On a monotonous afternoon some of the younger set decided to try it out and, as there were no bombs available, they decided to make their own by filling some jam tins with stones, shrapnel, mud, or anything they could find. They then repaired to the trench and took turns at working the rusty machine. Everything went fine. The dial was set at sixty yards, and the jam tins left the pocket nicely, arched over our front line and landed in no man's land. Butch Crammon had to be different. He changed the dial and pulled the handles with a jerky motion. His jam tin left the pocket in a hurry and seemed to go higher than all the others, but didn't travel quite so far. In fact, it only travelled as far as our own front line and when it came down it landed on poor Harold's noggin almost knocking him cold. He still carries the scar. We were all sorry, Butch more so than the rest of us, as Harold was one of the best-liked in the Platoon and one of the most obliging. He later proved this when he became Steward of the little "Y" at Vierstraat.

Harold and I were discussing this incident some time ago and we believed that six or seven took part in the experiment. The accident happened late in September (1915) and by the following spring, at least three of those involved (Carthy, Drinkwater & Lee) had been killed in action and two others including Jimmy Cork had been so severely wounded they never returned to the Battalion. The turnover of Officers and Men in all the Infantry Battalions was tremendous. That was why there were nearly three thousand replacements sent to the Eighteenth Battalion during hostilities.